

## *Gospels Study and Discussion Questions*

### *Lesson One: Jesus' Birth and Onset of Ministry – Matthew 1-4, Luke 1-2, and John 1*

*Unless otherwise noted, all questions in this lesson and subsequent lessons refer to the underlined Scripture references listed at the beginning of each of the five sections within the lesson (often given as readings).*

#### Read Jesus' genealogy in Matthew 1:1-17.

- 1) What do the fourteen men listed after David have in common? See several of the following references to get the idea. One reference is listed for each man (Jehoiachin and Jeconiah are names for the same individual). 1 Chronicles 28:5, 2 Chronicles 9:30-31, 12:16, 14:1, 17:1, 21:1, 26:1, 27:1, 28:1, 29:1, 33:1, 33:21, 34:1, 36:9. **They were all kings of Judah.**
- 2) According to the Old Testament, the Messiah would descend from King David (2 Samuel 7:11-16). Based on what you learned in Question 1, for what likely reason did Matthew include Jesus' genealogy in his Gospel? **Jesus' genealogy proves that He was David's descendant and the rightful heir to Israel's throne. Matthew sought to persuade his Jewish audience that Jesus was their long-awaited Messiah.**
- 3) List the surprising facts you discover about Messiah's ancestors from the following passages: Genesis 27:36, 38:13-16; 2 Samuel 12:7-10; 1 Kings 11:4, and 2 Kings 21:6, 16. Read Galatians 4:4-5 and tell what encouragement you receive from all of the preceding passages about the fact that Jesus came to redeem *you* and make *you* God's child and heir. **Jacob was a deceiver, Judah and Tamar deceived one another, David killed Uriah in order to cover up his adultery with Uriah's wife, Solomon served idols, and Manasseh was an extremely evil king (leading Judah into idolatry, sacrificing his own son to idols, and shedding a great deal of innocent blood). Jesus' genealogy included very sinful people. Personal sharing**

#### Read Matthew 1:18 – 2:23.

- 4) To what Old Testament predictions does Matthew refer in 1:18-23; 2:1-6; 2:14-15; 2:16-18, and 2:23? What was Matthew intending to prove by them? **In 1:1, Matthew declares that Jesus was the Messiah. Matthew offered proof of this statement by showing that Jesus fulfilled the following Messianic prophecies: Jesus was born to a virgin in Bethlehem (1:22-23 and 2:5-6), Jesus came out of Egypt (2:15), mothers in Bethlehem mourned their dead children (an event related to Jesus birth [2:18]), and Jesus was a Nazarene (2:23).**
- 5) Reread Matthew 1:18 and 22 with Luke 1:34-35. What clear statement is presented here about whether or not Mary was sexually active? How do the verses explain her pregnancy (who was Jesus' Father)? **Mary was a virgin who conceived a child by a special work of the Holy Spirit of God. God was Jesus' Father.**
- 6) What do you learn about Jesus' person, origin, character, and mission from John 1:1-5, 9-18 (John calls Jesus "The Word" and "God the One and Only/the Only Begotten Son")? **Jesus existed at the beginning of time. He is *with* God and yet He also *is* God. Only He has seen God the Father. All that has been created was made through Him. Nevertheless, many people rejected Him. Those who received Him were given the right to become God's children. He put on flesh and lived on earth. He is the revelation of God to humans. He is full of grace and truth, and He came that we might receive His grace and truth. Life is found in Him and that life is light for all mankind, a light that darkness cannot overcome.**
- 7) As indicated by all the passages cited in Questions 4-6, the Gospel writers believed Jesus was no ordinary human being. Would you say that your view of Jesus is as lofty as that of the Gospel writers? If not, why not? If so, which current, personal decisions are being impacted by your high view of Him? **Personal sharing**

Read Luke 1:26-38, 46-55, and 2:1-51 (You may also refer to Matthew 1:18 – 2:23 and John 1 for your answers).

- 8) Use all of the above passages to very briefly (in a few words) describe:
- Mary **Brave and humble**
  - Joseph **Brave and obedient**
  - Simeon **Righteous, devout, full of the Holy Spirit, prophet, full of faith and anticipation, spoke truth boldly**
  - Anna **Prophetess, faithful worshipper, woman of prayer, self-disciplined (fasting)**
  - King Herod **Evil, narcissistic, and paranoid**
  - The Shepherds **Sincere and grateful**
  - The Wise Men **Sincerely seeking**
- 9) Who made sacrifices (knowingly or without knowing) for (or as a result of) Jesus coming into the world as a baby? What were their sacrifices? **Jesus condescended to become human, a greater sacrifice than we can imagine. Mary and Joseph sacrificed their reputations, and to some extent, their parental rights, to shape the destiny of their Son (Luke 2:41-50). The parents of the baby boys killed in Bethlehem suffered greatly and might never have fully understood the significance of their suffering. The wise men traveled far, gave costly gifts, and lost favor with Herod by not returning to him as he requested.**
- 10) Based on what you have read in this lesson and any other Bible study you have had, what makes Jesus' birth sacred, awesome, and celebratory? How will you celebrate today (be as specific as possible)? **Jesus' birth is the only time in human history when God became man. He came to dwell among us (Matthew 1:23). His willingness to become human is an absolute wonder (a miracle and sacrifice of love)! His birth is also a wonder in that it was miraculous and fulfilled many prophecies. Personal sharing**

Read Matthew 3.

- 11) Skim Mark 1:2-11; Luke 1:5-25, 57-80; 3:1-22; and John 1:6-8, 15, 19-34 for additional information about John the Baptist.
- Who was John the Baptist and what was his message? **John was the son of a priest named Zechariah and a formerly barren woman named Elizabeth (Luke 1). He was also Jesus' cousin (Luke 1:36), a prophet who lived in the desert, eating locusts and wild honey, and wearing clothing made of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist (Mark 1). As the forerunner of Christ (John 1:23), John prepared the way for Him by preaching a message of repentance and the nearness of God's Kingdom (Matthew 3:2) and announcing that someone greater than he was coming (Luke 3:16, John 1:15). John urged a baptism of repentance and evidence by deeds (fruit [Matthew 3:8]). He boldly confronted the religious leaders of the day, insisting that they had made the mistake of believing that being Jewish was enough to save them (Matthew 3:9).**
  - John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. Define repentance. **Repentance is sorrow over wrongdoing. According to Biblical teaching, repentance that leads to salvation involves more than mere regret. It involves genuine grief, changed thinking concerning personal sin, and reformed behavior (Matthew 3:8 and Luke 3:10, 11).**
- 12) According to Romans 6:1-5, what is the meaning of Christian baptism? Have you followed Christ's example and command (Matthew 28:19 and Acts 2:38) by being baptized? If so, plan to share about this experience with your discussion group. If you have received Christ and yet not been baptized, whom will you ask this week to help you make the arrangements? **Jesus commanded His followers to be baptized upon repentance (salvation) as a symbol of their decision to die to their old life of sin (just as Christ died for us on the cross) and be "raised" to a new life in Christ (just as Christ was literally raised from the dead). It is an outward symbol of an inward reality and a way of publicly identifying with Christ. Personal sharing**

Read Matthew 4:1-25.

**13)** Consider Jesus' temptation and read Hebrews 4:15 and 1 John 2:16.

- a) Matthew 4:1 says Jesus was tempted by "the devil." What other names does the Bible give the devil (see Genesis 3:1, Matthew 13:19, John 8:44, 12:31 and Revelation 12:9)? Do these verses depict him as merely a concept of evil or an actual being? **Other Biblical names for the devil include "the serpent," "the evil one," "liar," and "father of lies," "prince of this world," "great dragon," "ancient serpent," and "Satan." He is depicted as an actual being, not merely a concept.**
- b) Describe the three ways Jesus was tempted and His method of resistance. **First, Jesus was tempted with bread (food). The essence of the temptation was pleasure for the flesh rather than fulfilling God's purpose for Him in the fast. Secondly, Jesus was tempted to gain popular favor by having angels rescue Him when He cast himself off the roof of the Temple. The essence of this temptation was the opportunity for immediate recognition as Messiah rather than the more difficult road to recognition by the Cross. The third temptation was to gain the kingdoms of the world in exchange for worshipping Satan. It is a more difficult temptation to understand. It seems that God has granted Satan limited authority over this world for a season and that Satan was tempting Jesus to expedite His (recognized) rulership of the world. Satan tempted Jesus to trade ultimate glory for immediate glory. In all three cases, Jesus resisted temptation by quoting Scripture.**
- c) Read James 1:13-15 and Philippians 4:11. Behind every evil desire that entices us lies a spirit of discontent. What temptation or inner restlessness can you trace to discontentment? What Bible verse can you use today to combat this discontentment? **Personal sharing**

**14)** List the activities that were a part of Jesus' early ministry by skimming or examining any titles/headings given in your Bible for Matthew 4:12-25, Mark 1:14-3:19, Luke 4:31-6:16, and John 1:35-4:42. **Jesus preached the good news of the Kingdom ("Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near"), called His disciples (Simon and Andrew, James and John), taught in synagogues, and healed every disease and sickness among the people in Galilee. He also cast out demons, spent time in early morning prayer, forgave sins, answered questions, dealt with crowds, appointed His 12 apostles, and performed miracles (His first was changing water to wine at Cana). He cleared the Temple in Jerusalem, met privately with a member of the Sanhedrin (Nicodemus) and a Samaritan adulteress.**

**15)** How could you follow Jesus' example this week by...

- a) teaching someone you do not know very well something about the Kingdom of God? **Personal sharing**
- b) bringing healing in someone's life? **Personal sharing**
- c) building into the life of an individual you are intentionally training/discipling? **Personal sharing**